

Origen's Apokatastasis:
Rethinking Universal Salvation
in
Modern Church

A thesis

by

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Abstract

This paper examines Origen's Apokatastasis and the reasons of its condemnation. It points out the historical, political and cultural reasons why the teaching of universal salvation was condemned as heretical and why there was a lack of theological discussion. The reason why universal salvation has been marginalized in mainstream Western and Protestant churches in the past was somehow related to the definition of "orthodoxy". Making use of Heidegger's and Bultmann's ontological approach of understanding and interpretation, it points out that the definition of "orthodoxy" should be subjected to time and people's concerns. So, modern factors should be considered. The thesis therefore includes views of some representative modern theologians like Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, and Hans Küng, on the issue universal salvation. It leads to the conclusion that diversity in soteriology should be allowed as in the creeds as well as in the theology of these well-respected modern theologians. Reviewing the modern approaches towards soteriology, i.e. exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism and particularism, the writer thinks that Origen's Apokatastasis can better respond to the modern needs than the conservative exclusive approach which is still common in Protestant churches in Hong Kong. The writer's concern about the phenomenon of over-narrowing the sense of salvation is expressed at the end.

摘要

本論文主要探討俄利根之萬物復歸論及其被定罪之原因，當中指出主要的歷史、政治及文化因素，以致此普救教導在缺乏足夠神學討論下被定為異端。在過去，普教論一直被西方教會及新教邊緣化，其中原因某程度上與所謂「正統」的定義有關。筆者從海德格及布特曼對如果理解事物的存在論及詮釋觀點，指出「正統」的定義會受時間和人的不同關注所影響。所以要界定教導是否「正統」，必須考慮當時的時代處境。所以在現今香港基督教會，要定義何謂「正統」的救贖論時，不能不考慮現代因素，而純粹選擇性地把歷史上曾被奉為正統的教導看為絕對真理，排斥同樣有神學理據的普救論。因此本文引述幾位有代表性的現代神學家對普救的看法，當中包括巴特、田立克、拉內、漢斯·昆。結果可見，不但各信經容納不同的救贖論存在，這些廣受尊重的神學家也沒有否定普救的可能性。檢視現代對救贖的四種取態，即排斥主義、包容主義、多元主義及特殊主義，筆者發現俄利根之萬物復歸論，比現今仍流行於香港基督教會的保守排他態度，更能回應時代的現實狀況及需要。最後，筆者亦表達極度關注教會中把救恩定義過度狹隘化的現象。

Content

	Page
Introduction	1
1 Origen's Apokatastasis	3
Clement: He indeed saves all	3
Origen: All will be subjected to God	4
Historical Background of Apokatastasis	6
Origen's Theological System	7
2 Early Controversies	9
Accusations against Origen	9
The Condemnation of Origen in Council of Constantinople	12
The Theological Ideas awaiting discussions	17
3 Why was universal salvation marginalized by "orthodoxy"?	18
The definition of "orthodoxy"	18
<i>Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus</i>	24
The Influence of Augustine	27
<i>Sola Fide</i>	32
4 Views of Modern Theologians	36
Conclusion	44
Appendix	46
Bibliography	50

Introduction

Salvation is a concern of paramount importance for all Christians. How can one be saved and who will be saved? In spite of its importance, none of the creeds has ever provided an “official” way to eternal life or the exact definition of salvation. It has been, sort of, left “open”. Many theologians have been trying to answer these questions in the past centuries. Cyprian of Carthage would say, “*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus.*” Augustine, Calvin and those who believe in predestination would say only those chosen by God could be saved. Therefore, the remaining are destined to be condemned. This may sound rather arbitrary and raise the arguments in theodicy. In the contrary, for many people with evangelical backgrounds, Luther’s *Sola Fide* would be a better answer. Most of them believe that “justification by faith” is the only way to salvation. They may understand it the way that the Norwegian dogmatic theologian Ole Hallesby did-- anyone who does not believe in Jesus Christ would go straight to hell when he or she died.¹ However, for many people, like me, with beloved ones dead without becoming Christians, this kind of teaching is definitely not a gospel (good news). In such case, the possibility of a universal salvation would, on the contrary, offer precious hope and comfort. Unfortunately, this possibility has never been popular in church. This idea is scarcely mentioned in Protestant church, somehow regarded as a kind of “liberal theology”, if not treated as heretic. In fact, the possibility of universal salvation was raised in the first three centuries by early fathers. Origen’s Apokatastasis was the most well-known one despite its controversy. Nevertheless, the possibility of universal salvation has been marginalized and neglected by the “orthodoxy” in church. Worst of all, Origen (ca. 185-ca. 251 C.E.) was condemned heretic in the Council of Constantinople in 553CE. For the Western Church, Augustine was the most dominating figure and keeps being influential to the

¹ Hans Küng, *Credo: The Apostles’ Creed Explained For Today*, (NY: Doubleday, 1992), 172.

Reformed Protestant Church. His denial of universal salvation has almost stamp apokatastasis out in the mainstream.

In this thesis, I will try to find out whether universal salvation should be taught or mentioned in the modern church by looking into the history of Christian thoughts. An attempt to find out whether Origen's Apokatastasis was theologically incorrect will be made and I will point out that the accusations against it were not out of theological discussion. Then, I will discuss why some other doctrines in Soteriology were most accepted as "orthodoxy" in the church history, in terms of the definition of "orthodoxy" in an ontological approach of Heidegger and Bultmann, and why they were not universally appropriate in all times and all "worlds". The views of some representative modern theologians, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich and Hans Küng, on the issue universal salvation will be included then in the last chapter. At last, I want to point out that, while it is difficult to justify some major parts of Origen's apokatastasis, the possibility of universal salvation cannot be ruled out. The idea could not stay among the mainstream teachings of the church because there were concerns in church discipline and authority in certain periods of time. The major views in Soteriology were produced to cater for the needs in particular circumstances. Therefore, as past circumstances are no more valid nowadays, we should feel free to talk about the possibility of universal salvation when necessary in modern church, for instance, when providing pastoral support to Christians with loved ones passing away unevangelized. Last but not least, I would like to express my concern about the trend of over-narrowing the meaning of salvation into a simple confession and the abundance and diversity in soteriology should be sustained in church as the Ecumenical Creeds did.

Chapter One

Origen's Apokatastasis

Apokatastasis came from Stoics of the ancient Greek Philosopher Zeno. Originally, it was a technical astronomical term referring to the periodic return of the constellations to the original positions as in the previous year, but later, developed into the concept of a universal "restoration" or salvation in Christianity.² It is a distinctive feature of the eschatology of Origen, his teacher Clement of Alexandria and his fourth-century admirer Gregory of Nyssa. Through the idea of apokatastasis, Origen expressed an ultimate hope that all rational creatures would experience the restoration to their original, pre-fall state of union with God. Based on this hope, he considered the punishment after death not eternal but limited in duration and redemptive in nature.³ In other words, after certain period of punishment, condemned souls could return to God. Origen is known as an important figure of the Alexandria tradition but it is believed that he was considerably influenced by Clement. So, Clement's universal restoration will be explained below as a starting point of the concept of apokatastasis.

Clement: He indeed saves all

Clement was probably the first Christian writer to suggest the possibility of universal salvation for all intelligent creatures.⁴ He found the salvation of the universe necessary for theodicy, while not violating human free will, as God is forever saving through his Son. It is done through free human response to divine discipline either in the present life or after death through the final judgment. So, all

² See Walter Bauer, *Greek-Chinese Lexicon*, trans. Wright Doyle (HK: Conservative Baptist Press, 1986), Henry G. Liddell ed., *Greek-English Lexicon*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Charles H. Chao ed., *A Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 2nd and rev. ed. (Taipei: Reformation Translation Fellowship, 1990).

³ Steven R. Harmon, *Every knee should bow: Biblical Rationales for Universal Salvation in Early Christian Thought*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 2003), p. 1.

⁴ Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 47.

rational creatures, both human and angels, can be saved but, among them, some will be saved only through redemptive punishment after death.⁵ Concerning the “fiery eternal punishment”, Clement expressed in his writings that such tortures are for corrective discipline. Thus, the punishment after death is “primarily educational and redemptive rather than retributive in nature and purpose.”⁶ Otherwise, it would be contrary to the character of God. Besides, he also emphasized the medicinal nature of punishment. These lead to “the logical conclusion that the corrective tortures of hell must ultimately come to an end.” The God of goodness indeed wants to save all and his goodness will eventually persuade everyone to repent freely through the final judgment.⁷

Origen: All will be subjected to God

Origen not only adapted Clement’s ideas on universal restoration and the nature of punishment, but also further developed them. However, he stated clearly in his tractates, commentaries and homilies that his suggestions were only possibilities.⁸ He made it very obvious before the discussion on this matter in *De Principiis*.

However, we say these things with great fear and caution, more by way of discussing and investigating than by settling matters certainly and definitely. For we have indicated above which things are matters clearly delimited by dogma; and I believe we have done this to the best of our ability when we discussed the Trinity. But concerning the present matters, as much as we are able we are engaging in discussion rather than definition.⁹

In spite of his lack of certainty about eschatological matter and reluctance to make this view the official teaching of the church, he tried to support the idea with biblical texts and logical arguments. Origen believed there would be eschatological punishment for all people but, at the same time, there would be an ultimate

⁵ Harmon, pp. 19-21.

⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁸ Ibid., p. 51.

⁹ Origen, *De Principiis*, 1.6.1 (translation of Rufinus), quoted in Harmon, p. 51.

restoration. The rationale of this restoration is that all will finally be subjected to Christ as said in the Bible and subjection to Christ brings salvation.¹⁰ In Psalm 109(110):1, it says, “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool. (ΕΙΠΕΝ ὁ Κύριος τῷ Κυρίῳ μου· κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου, ἕως ἄν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου.)” and in 60(61), “Shall not my soul be subjected to God? For of him is my salvation. (Οὐχὶ τῷ Θεῷ ὑποταγίσεται ἡ ψυχὴ μου; παρ’ αὐτῷ γὰρ τὸ σωτήριόν μου)”¹¹ The Apostle Paul also says, “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ...then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one (all in all).”¹² So, Origen believed that at the end of the world, everyone will be subjected to God and such subjection indicates salvation:

Therefore the end of the world and the consummation will come about when everyone will yet be subjected to punishments as the deserved consequence of sins, at the time which God alone knows, when he will pay each one what is deserved. But we believe that the goodness of God through Christ may restore his whole creation to one end, with even the enemies being subjugated and subdued. ...For the term subjection—which has to do with our subjection to Christ—indicates the salvation of those who are subject, which is from Christ....¹³

Origen’s eschatology echoes with his doctrine of creation. As a spiritual eschatology, there seems to be trace of Platonist influence. He suggested that all rational beings will return to their primeval status in union with God,¹⁴ as he believed, “for the end

¹⁰ Harmon, p. 51.

¹¹ Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton trans., *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, London: Hendrickson Publishers, 1851.

¹² RSV, 1 Corinthians 15:25-28. Verse 28 in KJV is “God may be all in all” instead.

¹³ Origen, *De Principiis*, 1.6.1, quoted in Harmon, pp. 51-52.

¹⁴ Justo L. Gonzalez, *A history of Christian Thought Vol. 1*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 227.

is always like the beginning (*Semper enim similis est finis initiis*).¹⁵ Origen also expressed this concept of such “restoration” in *Homiliae* 1-20 in *Jeremiam*.¹⁶

Concerning the nature and duration of punishment after death, Origen’s view was similar to Clement’s. He regarded the punishments redemptive, so the duration should be limited by the goal of redemption. This view can be seen in his work *De Oratione* that “receiving ‘in the fire’ and ‘in the prison’ not ‘a penalty for error’ but rather a benefit for the purification of the evils that belong to the error along with the salvation that comes from the sufferings...”¹⁷ Here, he did not take the literal meaning but employed the allegorical interpretation.¹⁸ In other words, God would like us to undergo trials in the world and ultimately return to the harmony in union with all rational beings as the origin. In the process, he emphasized that the punishment is remedial and persuasive in nature and it does not make people good against their free will. All rational beings include evil spirits, even Satan. Then, hell and condemnation would not be eternal.¹⁹ At last, there will be no evil and all will be subjected to God.

Historical Background of Apokatastasis

There have been a lot of discussions on Origen’s Apokatastasis over centuries, some supporting while a lot criticizing. Before we get into such discussions, the historical context where the idea was nurtured should be mentioned. I believe that theology never comes out from nothing. There may be certain situations that a particular theology was responding to. It may not be fair or accurate to discuss the idea without

¹⁵ Origen, *De Principiis*, 1.6.2, quoted in Harmon, p. 52.

¹⁶ P. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History & Eschatology*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 288.

¹⁷ Origen, *De Oratione*, 29.15, quoted in Harmon, p. 57.

¹⁸ Origen was the chief theoretician of allegorical interpretation but his interpretation was not founded on some arbitrary set of correspondences, but on the belief that God’s *oikonomia* operates in the same way in Scripture and in other areas. Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen*, (NY: Routledge, 1998), p. 62.

¹⁹ Justo L. Gonzalez, *A history of Christian Thought Vol. 1*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 227-228 and Harmon pp. 56-57.

understanding it in its context.

In Origen's time, many doctrines of the Church were not yet definitely established. Many that seem to be basic doctrines to us nowadays were not yet agreed or even suggested. It was not unusual to put forward tentative theological interpretation just for discussion in the first centuries before the doctrine began to settle.²⁰ For Origen, in many occasions he propounded interpretations in the hope that someone else might provide an improved resolution in the future. It was also not uncommon for him to express more than one view on a text, without opting any one of them, for the audience or readers to consider.²¹ He never tried to establish his theories of "apokatastasis" or "pre-existence of souls" as doctrines. They were raised to be discussed as possibilities. Or in other words, he was proposing a kind of hope.²²

In the third century, the Gnostic crisis and astrological determinism were still threatening the Church. As a great Greek philosopher, Origen tried to respond to Gnosticism and astrological determinism by addressing the questions of evil, human free will and God's justice. He argued that the Fall happened before the creation of the material world.²³ His positing of the pre-existence of souls was a way to explain that God was not responsible for evil.²⁴

Origen's Theological System

As mentioned before, the concept of apokatastasis was not "invented" by Origen. However, he is always regarded as the person bringing the idea of universal salvation into Christianity because he did not only find biblical grounds and logical analysis to

²⁰ Tzamalikos, p. 23.

²¹ Tzamalikos, p. 19.

²² Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, translated by A. S. Worrall, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), pp. 264-265 and Gao Zhe, "The Indispensable Hope: A Reflection on Origen's apokatastasis" in Xu Zhiwei ed., *Regent Review of Christian Thoughts* Vol. 8, 2008: 1, p. 17.

²³ David Ivan Rankin, *From Clement to Origen: The Social and Historical Context of the Church Fathers*, (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Pub., c2006), p. 133.

²⁴ Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 7.

support this idea, but also created a complete theological framework alongside.²⁵

The whole idea was inseparable from his doctrine of God, Christology, creation and Eschatology and it may also be necessary to understand the concept in the light of Neo-Platonism as he believed theologians, after setting their roots in the Bible, should also try to understand things philosophically, that was Neo-Platonic philosophy in Origen's case.²⁶

In the Platonic tradition, there was an element, suggested by Aristotle, that "God" is "moving the world, not causally by pushing it from outside, but by driving everything finite toward him by means of love." Everything has the desire to unite itself with "God" to "get rid of the lower forms in which it lives, where it is in the bondage of matter."²⁷ I believe that this element is somehow related to the idea in apokatastasis that all rational creatures will ultimately reunite with God.

God is the source of everything and the eternal Logos is eternally generated out of the divine substance. There are other spirits that fell away from their unity with God in their free will. As the result of their revolt in heaven against God, they may have fallen into material bodies. It means that our human existence and the existence of reality are considered not only as creation, but also as guilt and judgment. That explains why the world is universally fallen.²⁸ Concerning salvation, when people follow the example of the Logos, they become *logikoi* and they are led back to deification. It was made possible by Jesus sacrificing his body as a ransom to Satan.²⁹ Origen's eschatology is a spiritual one, with the focus on apokatastasis which has been explained above.

²⁵ Gao, pp. 14-15.

²⁶ Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*. Carl E. Braaten ed. (NY: Touchstone, 1972), 57.

²⁷ Tillich, p. 7.

²⁸ Tillich, pp. 59-61.

²⁹ Tillich, p. 62.

Chapter Two

Early Controversies

Accusations against Origen

Despite a large pool of supporters in the first few centuries, criticism against Origen began in his lifetime and peaked at the Condemnations in 553 CE. Some of the early accusations were rather bizzare.³⁰ On the other hand, the intention, reliability and integrity of the accusers are in doubt as compared to Origen's upright personality. People found his teaching heretical may not be familiar with his writing style, in addition to their poor command of Greek, many charges were raised out of misunderstanding.³¹ Besides, prejudice towards Origen was quite obvious in some cases. In Pamphilus' experience, he found Origen's detractors pleased with his writings when they did not know the author. But once they knew those were from Origen, the writings would become displeasing and even heretical for them.³²

Among Origen's detractors, some were previous supporters, or at least fanatics of his works, and Jerome was one of them. He was once a very enthusiastic worker on Origen's work and possessed a huge collection of his literature. Many Origen's ideas are employed in Jerome's early writings. Jerome was also a close friend of his later major opponent in the Origen controversy, Rufinus, in his early life. However, for some reasons, Jerome suddenly became one of the main, and maybe the most powerful, detractors of Origenism in his time. Such abrupt change is more likely to be related to conflicts in the social elite networks of the fourth century, rather than concrete theological issues. Most of the key characters, both for and against Origen, involved in the most drastic drama of the debate in that period of time were

³⁰ Origen was accused of teaching the doctrine of *metempsychosis*, that is, the transmigration of human souls after death into animals. (St. Pamphilus, *Apology for Origen*, p. 21)

³¹ Ibid, p. 44.

³² Ibid.

somehow related in terms of relations involving kinship, marriage, hospitality, proffered and received, religious mentorship, gift-giving, literary and financial patronage.³³ Therefore, the attacks towards Origen should not be viewed entirely as actions “defending Orthodoxy”. The possibility of having elements of friendship gone awry, jealousy, betrayal, larceny, bribery, vanity, etc. involved should not be neglected. After all, the prejudice and calumny towards Origen’s admittedly heterodox genius were quite obvious.³⁴ Although Jerome was canonized, while Rufinus, Origen and many other accused Origenists were not, it does not mean that he could be considered most trust worthy. Despite his sudden change towards Origen and his acts in defamed Rufinus, Jerome’s character and his practice of utilizing every means to attacks people having conflicts with him can be seen clearly in the facts how he attacked his bishop, John of Jerusalem,³⁵ and defamed Ambrose of Milan.³⁶ On the contrary, people who know Origen in person would not deny that he was a person with genuine humility. It is seen that Origen always speaks with a great fear of God and was never ashamed to confess that the subjects he discussed might not be clear to him. He always proposed more than one explanation for the questions discussed, not professing he had attained the perfect and complete interpretations in everything.³⁷ Having been conferred priesthood by the Church, Origen led a ‘philosophical’ manner of life, practiced extreme self-denial, observed the pure

³³ It was a popular practice at that time that wealthy men and women would provide funds for the building of churches and monasteries, commissioned (usually by ‘requesting’) works of Christian literature, and lent social prestige to the activities of theologians who were low on cash but high on learned reflection. The relations of different groups of theologians and patronage were very complicated. (Clark, pp. 16-17.)

³⁴ Clark, Pamphilus, Rufinus and many other authors who have discussed the Origen’s issues have seen this and provided examples as proof.

³⁵ John of Jerusalem had conflicts with Jerome over the ordaining of Jerome’s brother Paulinianus in Palestine, (Clark, p. 14.)

³⁶ Pamphilus, pp. 9-10.

³⁷ Pamphilus, pp. 40-41.

discipline of the Christian faith, and devoted to the Word of God and to teaching.³⁸ He was a teacher of the Church for so many years, who fought steadfastly and boldly against heresies that were assailing the Church at that time.³⁹ Some dubious theological motifs found in Origen's books may have been inserted by heretics after his death.⁴⁰ So, it is groundless to be hostile to the interpretations and teachings of Origen just because of those heretic accusations towards him after his death.

Other more concrete accusations included the suspicion of his being proto-Arian and his allegorizing interpretation of the Scripture. The Holy Trinity is one of the most difficult theological concepts beyond human comprehension. Many theologians have tried to explain it but widely accepted ones are scarce. Origen's analogy that Jesus is like the sunlight eternally emitted from the sun (the Father) is certainly one of the prominent interpretations that it has been an important concept in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Great Orthodox theologians like John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas have all utilized Origen's idea. If Origen's comment on the subject were regarded as proto-Arian, could those accusers suggest better explanations? Moreover, Athanasius, the fiercest foe of Arianism as everyone knows, was an admirer of Origen and praised him as "very learned and industrious". If Origen's trinitarianism were in any way associated with the heresy, how could Athanasius not found it offensive?⁴¹ Regarding allegorization, many key elements in Origen's theological system developed from his allegorical exegesis, like hellfire is not external and 'coats of skins' of Genesis 3:21 means the bodies acquired by the fallen souls.⁴² In the discussion of whether Biblical texts should be understood as

³⁸ Pamphilus, p. 43.

³⁹ Pamphilus, p. 46.

⁴⁰ Clark, p. 12. And in fact, it happened to many other theologians, such as Clement of Rome, Athanasius, Cyprian, and even Jerome himself, (Pamphilus, p. 14).

⁴¹ Pamphilus, p. 22.

⁴² Clark, pp. 11-2.

allegory, it would be insane to accuse Origen of not taking literal interpretations of the Bible seriously. Would the person understanding the Holy Scripture so literally that he castrated himself favoured allegory interpretations over literal ones for no strong reasons? Responding to such attacks during his lifetime, Origen asks the detractors in his *Homilies on Ezekiel*, “without an allegorical exposition,” how they would understand “Jerusalem has breasts” and “an umbilical cord”?⁴³ Needless to mention is the fact of how frequent and common this way of bible interpretation has been adopted in the eras after Origen’s time. Of course, nevertheless, how to decide whether the application of allegorization is appropriate in individual cases is not easy to determine or reach a universal consent.

The Condemnations of Origen in the Council of Constantinople

The many accusations above may have disgraced Origen but could not make him “guilty”. Nothing is more powerful than the anathemas that could make the whole world more hostile towards Origen and his doctrines. But what exactly did the Councils of Constantinople condemn? According to the translation of Richard Price⁴⁴ (Appendix I), the preexistence of soul, spiritual resurrection, salvation of Satan and demons, which are all important parts of apokatastasis, were involved in the condemnation in 543 and the Canons in 553 further anathematized the universal restoration in a more explicit way. However, if one looks at the Canons closely, he/she cannot avoid noticing the fact of “Word of God”, “our Lord Jesus Christ”, etc. being the focus in the texts. To be explicit, I believe the Council’s major concern was Christology, rather than Eschatology or Soteriology, and more unlikely, apokatastasis. Besides, how could a person and his teachings be condemned hundreds years after his death, but not during his lifetime? To pick on a person or certain teachings after

⁴³ Clark, pp. 11-2.

⁴⁴ Richard Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553* (Vol. 2), (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), pp. 281, 284-286.

three hundred years, there must be particular purposes and thesis behind. Scholars have pointed out that behind the condemnation, controversies after Chalcedon, Justinian's political concerns and conflicts in Palestine in that period of time were involved.⁴⁵ Theological "correctness", unfortunately, was far less important and influential.

After the Chalcedon Council (451), in which it was declared that Christ is one person in two natures, Godhead and manhood, the disputes over the nature of Christ, however, remained unresolved. Worse, it led to the schism between Chalcedon and Non-Chalcedon Churches. It was understood by some critics that such Definition of the Faith means that "Christ" is a mere name for two distinct entities, externally linked, as the term "nature" (Φύσις) could mean an individual entity. Opponents of Chalcedon accused the council of following the teaching of Nestorius (d. 451), separating the Godhead and manhood of Christ into two distinct persons, even it ostensibly condemned him. The Definition emphasized the authority of Cyril of Alexandria but held back from adopting the full Cyrillian position. The Non-Chalcedonians insisted that the human nature of Christ was not a distinct entity but simply a new set of attributes taken on by the Divine Word at his incarnation. So, they were called "monophysites" by their opponents.⁴⁶ Subsequent opposition to the council was massive in much of the east, including Egypt, Palestine and Syria.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁵ Price, p. 280, and Prat, F. (1911), "Origen and Origenism", In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, Retrieved June 1, 2011 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11306b.htm>).

⁴⁶ Richard Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553 (Vol. 1)*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), p. 1.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 2.

Henotikon was then drafted by Patriarch Acacius of Constantinople in an attempt of restoring unity to the Churches by modifying the official stance towards Cyril and Chalcedon.⁴⁸ It succeeded in restoring peace for only a short term and, eventually, more conflicts broke out. Rome, some monks in Constantinople and many of the monasteries in Palestine, who were in the extreme Chalcedonian position, not only rejected the *Henotikon* but also refused to communion with anyone who accepted it. Some Chalcedonian patriarchs and bishops in the east were required to subscribe to the *Henotikon* as a condition of holding their sees. There were also some moderates who rejected the definitions of Chalcedon remained in communion with the Chalcedonians who accepted the *Henotikon*. However, the extreme Anti-Chalcedonians insisted that to remain in communion with Chalcedonians was a betrayal of the faith and considered it a share in their guilt. So, they refused to obey the miaphysite patriarchs and bishops who remained in communion with Chalcedonians who accepted the *Henotikon*.⁴⁹ Actions became more radical when it was approaching early sixth century. Strong arm tactics by Chalcedonian monks against their anti-Chalcedonian brethren in Palestine in 509 drove the monk Severus, the leader of the miaphysites to seek refuge at the court of Constantinople. Then, in 512, once the miaphysites managed to secure the election of Severus as bishop of Antioch, he anathematized Chalcedon.⁵⁰ During the long period between the Councils of Constantinople in 381 and 553, there were many other arguments related to Christology, like whether the incarnate Jesus had a human soul, arguments

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 5.

between Cyril and Nestorius over nature of the person of Christ, the prolonged fights between Antiochenes and Alexandrians, other arguments between Pro-Origenists and Anti-Origenists, etc. According to a well-informed monk of the time, Cyril of Scythopolis, there were frequent conflicts between supporters and opponents of Origenism in the monasteries of Palestine in the period 537-43.⁵¹ Tension between the pro- and anti-Origenist⁵² factions came to head as the patriarchs of both Jerusalem and Antioch wrote to Justinian in 543, pressing for a condemnation of Origen. They came in the right time as it was the emperor's concern to reaffirm the orthodoxy of the empire in the wake of the disasters of the early 540s. So, Justinian issued an edict and a set of canons condemning Origenism. Price believes Justinian might believe that it was an easy way to win divine favour as he believed Origenism was just an elite heresy with a limited following.⁵³ As we see in Appendix I, all the anathemas were related to people's understandings of Jesus. In the Canons of 543, only number 1 and 9 are from Origen, not directly related to Christology, but the others possibly were only developed from Origen's theology. It might be thought that Origen's theology or his suggestions for discussion were used as authority by some heresies, and by anathematizing the pre-existence of soul as well as the universal restoration, the other heretical teachings developed would have nothing to base on, so condemning them altogether would be the best solution. The Canons of 553 became much longer and more detailed. It was probably an attempt to further explain

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵² Origenists describe groups or people believing in the subordination of Persons, allegorism in Scripture interpretation and a final restoration, which are attributed, rightly or wrongly, to Origen, but what they hold are not necessarily Origen's theology. Prat, F. (1911) .

⁵³ Price. *Vol. 1*, p. 17.

the 543 Canons and settle disputes raised. It is clear that the amendments are further away from Origen's teachings. It could be evidence indicating the target and direction of the anathema was not Origen but something else. After all, the allegedly Origenist faction was definitely not united and contain critics as well as admirers of Origen. We can hardly say anathematizing Origenists equals to condemning Origen's theology. One more view should be taken into consideration is that even Gregory the Nyssa also held the views of after death punishment not being eternal and got apokatastasis in his theology, he was canonized as a saint in Church and was never branded as a heretic. Therefore, it is further supported that the anathema was directed towards the Miaphysite controversy and heretical groups in the sixth century rather than the elements in apokatastasis.

Even if the condemnation were really targeting on Origen, the decree was far from ecumenical. At least, it seemed that these were done without the consent of the Western Church. It was certain that the Council in 553 opened in spite of the protestations of Pope Vigilius and only the Acts concerning the "Three Chapters" were submitted for his approval.⁵⁴ Facundus of Hermiane who was in Constantinople and several other western bishops refused to subscribe to the decree of censuring the "Three Chapters", alleging that it was an attack of the Council of Chalcedon.⁵⁵ In a letter addressed to Pope Vigilius, Facundus wrote, "They leapt forward to anathematize most holy and most glorious teachers for the reason of the doctrines that aired concerning pre-existence and restoration, in the manner of

⁵⁴ Prat, F., *ibid.* and Pelikan, p. 277.

⁵⁵ Healy, P. (1909), "Facundus of Hermiane," In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, Retrieved June 1, 2011 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05751a.htm>)

Origen, anathematizing all the holy men who had been before or after him.”⁵⁶ It was certain that the fifth Council was convoked exclusively to deal with the affair of the “Three Chapters”, and that neither Origen nor Origenism were the cause of it.⁵⁷

The theological ideas awaiting discussions

As a small conclusion, Origen suggested the idea of universal salvation as a possibility and it was open for discussion. However, scandals out of different intentions were attracted instead, some for ignorance and many others for personal interest and political reasons. Although Origen was not without supporters and there have been debates over the rationality of the doctrines of hell, most expressed their support towards the universal restoration anonymously due to anxiety and external pressure.⁵⁸ In short, most of the accusations towards the universal restoration were not theological based, so the “doctrine” of universal salvation has not got the chance to be developed or even openly, fairly discussed. There are some other, more prominent factors for the idea to be marginalized in church, rather than whether it is theologically correct.

⁵⁶ Price, Vol. 2, p. 276.

⁵⁷ Prat, F., *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Supporters of universal salvation are likely to experience pressure and consequences for holding and expressing this view. As late as 1853, F. D. Maurice still would lose his position in King’s College, London, because of espousing a view that was taken to be a straight affirmation of universal salvation. Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: eschatology in the thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 2-3.

Chapter Three

Why was universal salvation marginalized by “orthodoxy”?

Universal salvation has never been able to stay in the mainstream of the orthodoxy. Origen has even been labeled heterodoxy by some people. But what is “orthodoxy” and what is not? As I have mentioned that there were some other prominent factors outside theological discussion for universal salvation to be marginalized, in this chapter, I would like to point out the hermeneutical diversity, the practice of the Church using eternal condemnation as a tool to control members, and some other major views in Soteriology opposing universal salvation have been very influential in this matter. However, these reasons are no more valid in the contemporary church.

The Definition of “Orthodoxy”

“Orthodoxy” was defined as “things taught according to the apostolic traditions”. Like the Holy Scripture, the truth from Christ himself was passed to the apostles, then to the early fathers or bishops. What the apostles and early fathers taught, “that has been always believed referred with special force to ‘the doctrines of the fathers who spoke of God’”, is regarded as orthodoxy. In other words, doctrines were properly interpreted only when they were seen as standing in agreement with tradition.⁵⁹ As Origen’s theology has made use of secular knowledge, he was accused of reading Platonism into Bible.⁶⁰ Sounds clear and reasonable, but is it really such a simple job to define what is taught by the apostles and fathers? If so, no one needs to say anything about the Christian faith—people can simply read the

⁵⁹ Pelikan, pp. 336-337.

⁶⁰ Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen*, (NY: Routledge, 1998), p.64.

Bible and repeat what has been said word for word to deal with whatever questions or problems come in daily life. As the Scriptures and the early teachings came in certain historical moments, languages and cultures, they may not be easily understood by people years later in different cultures speaking different languages. Therefore, interpretation is always necessary. It is not the fact that people did not agree with the Holy Scripture or the teachings of the fathers, but the interpretations of these vary a lot. To be more explicit, I mean the true message behind the Scripture and the teachings is not exactly the same as the text and the literal wordings. To see this problem more clearly, we need to understand the issue of hermeneutics in an ontological way. Heidegger may be the best person explaining it.

Heidegger thought that most scholars overlooked the most basic issue before investigating what knowledge is.⁶¹ So, he tried to find out the nature of “Being”, which he regards as the foundation of understanding and all knowledge. Here, it is important to define certain important terms in Heidegger’s system, for example, “Being”, “*Dasein*”, “world”, “understanding” and “interpretation”.

“Being” is the primordial concept that every discipline is based on. A certain entity has to be chosen for investigation as “Being” is a virtual concept that you can never find out what it exactly is. The entity chosen was “*Dasein*”, which means being-there. “*Dasein*” may also be understood as one of the many beings. It is *Dasein* that asks the question “What is Being?”⁶² In Heidegger’s words, “*Dasein* is its possibility”.⁶³ “*Dasein*” exists and has its existence. When you try to understand “*Dasein*”, you must understand it through its “world”. Every being has its own “world” but the being does not create or choose its “world” but is being thrown into the “world”. It is

⁶¹ Michael Inwoods. *Heidegger: A very Short Introduction*, (NY: Oxford Press, 1997), p. 13.

⁶² Ibid, p. 20.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 23.

the average everydayness of *Dasein* but *Dasein* also has its particular mineness. *Dasein* and the world are not two distinct entities but complementary.⁶⁴ "Understanding" is a disclosure and the requirement is "being-in-the-world". "Understanding is the Being of such potentiality-for-Being, which is never something still outstanding as not yet present-at-hand, but which, as something which is essentially never present-at-hand, "is" with the Being of *Dasein*, in the sense of existence."⁶⁵ Whenever *Dasein* exists, it always has its understanding. The relationship of its existence and its understanding is somehow like what Descartes said as "*Cogito, ergo sum*". "Interpretation" is what we call for development of the understanding.⁶⁶ "In it the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it. In interpretation, understanding does not become something else. It becomes itself."⁶⁷ Interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding. It is the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding.⁶⁸ This interpretation is grounded in something we have in advance (fore-having), whenever something is interpreted, the interpretation will be founded upon something we see in advance (fore-seeing) and something we grasp in advance (fore-conception).⁶⁹ The interpretation then recedes into an understanding and becomes part of the world of *Dasein*.

Even Heidegger thinks that there is no such thing as a Christian philosophy, or phenomenological theology,⁷⁰ it may still be easier to understand the issue in the words of theological hermeneutics and exegesis. In Bultmann's explanation of his

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 37.

⁶⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), pp. 183-184.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 188.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 188-189.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 191.

⁷⁰ Martin Heidegger, "Phenomenology and Theology," In *The Piety of Thinking*, James G. Hart & John C. Maraldo eds. (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 21.

“demythologization”, the relationship between the message (the revelation, the *kerygma*, or whatever it is called) and how people understand it is elaborated in a more comprehensible way.

Heidegger was a close friend of Rudolf Bultmann and it is difficult to say whether Bultmann was highly influenced by Heidegger or vice versa. One thing can be sure, is that their views in hermeneutics are very close and Bultmann’s opinion on exegesis is just like the theological version of Heidegger’s phenomenology. His famous theory of “Demythologization” was another approach to protect the transcendence of God as he emphasized *Kerygma* in biblical interpretation. He connected theological thinking anew and the tradition of the critical reflection of philosophical principles in exegesis.⁷¹ Bultmann says that all literary documents are historically conditioned by circumstances of time and place.⁷² There is always a hermeneutic circle: when a text in ancient language has to be interpreted, the interpretation must be done in accordance with the rules of grammar.⁷³ Then, the individual usage of the author has to be found out. Afterwards, the question about individual author’s usage was expanded into the question about the use of language in the particular period of time in which the text was written.⁷⁴ In the case of exegesis, Bultmann was not putting forward any new method.⁷⁵ He just drew people to the fact that there is no direct revelation in Scripture but only veiled revelation, concealed in human words.⁷⁶ As Being, the pure revelation cannot be found but can only be understood in a certain world, in a certain human language, writing style.

⁷¹ Werner Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance*. (London: SCM, 1994), p. 147.

⁷² Rudolf Bultmann, et al. “The Problem of a Theological Exegesis of the New Testament”, “The Problem of Hermeneutics”, In Roger Johnson ed, *Rudolf Bultmann*. (San Francisco: Collins, 1987), p. 139.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 134.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 136.

culture and time. Demythologization is no new method but a necessary process in understanding the revelation in our own world. One important factor worth mentioning is that this understanding always happens in light of faith.

Therefore, it can be always correct to say that doctrines that follow the teachings of the Holy Scripture and the early fathers are called “orthodoxy” but, practically, judging whether doctrines correctly interpret the teachings of the Holy Scripture and the early fathers is controversial, and can be rather subjective most of the time. People in the first three centuries might still think they knew what the truth was: the Bible as they saw it interpreted by their ecclesiastical teachers. For example, Athanasius may claim that his teachers and Fathers all taught the same things. Even in his time, we can doubt, historically, whether he is right in saying so, but we certainly do not see and experience it in that way anymore. Approaching the modern time, anyone studies the teachings of the Bible and the fathers seriously would confess that many contradictions obviously exist if they are honest enough. Now, we can no longer claim that there is *the* Christian truth handed down from generation to generation. Our teachers contradict each other, and the difficulty is that we have no absolute norm to determine who of them is right.⁷⁷ So, to judge teachings by whether they comply with the apostolic traditions is neither objective nor practical, especially in modern time.

It is not just a “modern” philosophical understanding of the definition of “orthodoxy” but there are also historical support showing the “ancient” definition was not always unanimous. As mentioned before, the first norm of orthodox tradition was antiquity, that what early fathers have said was regarded as authority. However, not every theologian of the past could be elevated to authoritative status. Pelikan

⁷⁷ E. P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or Antithesis?* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007), p. 183.

mentioned an example of Augustine in his defense of the catholic faith against Manicheism that he had rejected “all the testimony you can bring in favor of your book from antiquity or tradition” as long as it did not agree with “the testimony of the catholic church ...supported by a succession of bishops from the original sees of the apostles to the present time.”⁷⁸ So, within antiquity, some teachers were to be preferred to others. One more norm of orthodoxy was for it to have been believed “by all”. In another example of Augustine in Pelikan’s book, Augustine added to the authority of the bishops a reference to “the consensus of so many nations.” “By all” means almost all priests and doctors but, obviously, not everyone had equal weight in the determination of what had been taught by all. Priests were counted for more than laymen, bishops more than priests, synods and council more than individual bishops.⁷⁹ Once an issue was determined “by all”, no one may raise any doubt against it without being condemned as unbelief or heretic. This kind of people would not even be given a hearing. So, the so-called norm of antiquity was selective, subjected to many subjective judgments.

One of the “offenses” in the accusation of Origen’s theology was that he read Greek philosophy, namely Platonism, into Bible. It is true that Origen drew deeply on every possible source and used Jewish tradition, philology, philosophy, natural science, etc. to interpret Bible in order to get closer to God.⁸⁰ He considered pagan knowledge to be preparation for understanding the gospel.⁸¹ Though he made use of Platonism a

⁷⁸ Pelikan, p. 337.

⁷⁹ Pelikan, pp. 337-338.

⁸⁰ Trigg, p. 62.

⁸¹ Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 118.

lot, he was not a Platonist.⁸² He was accused of having based more on Philosophy than the Bible but, in fact, he stood firmly against Greek culture and philosophy in many issues.⁸³ He described himself as a man of the church and he limited some of his speculations and adapted others to doctrinal and scriptural requirements. He was extremely aware that his speculations were innovative and he frequently expressed his views hesitantly. For example, before discussing the question of whether heaven is part of this world, Origen remarks that the matter is too high for a human being to comprehend. Like Irenaeus, he felt that many questions could only be decisively answered when we were in the kingdom of the heavens.⁸⁴ How can someone that concerned with the tradition of the church be “reading Greek philosophy into Bible”? Moreover, many other theologian, namely Jerome, also made use of philosophy in doing theology but only not blamed in such a way.

In conclusion, “orthodoxy” is abstract, depending a lot on further interpretation. It is not as simple as its literal meanings. We can see in the history that this way of defining orthodoxy is not practical but very subjective. The accusation of Origen being heterodoxy because of his making use of pagan knowledge was not fair either. As the line drawn between sacred and secular fields is blurring continuously and our world is extremely different from the world of the early fathers, new interpretation and understanding of orthodoxy is absolutely essential.

Extra ecclesiam nulla salus

Extra ecclesiam nulla salus has its historical roots in the first three centuries. Cyprian of Carthage is especially associated with this axiom but in fact Ignatius, the

⁸² Tzamalikos, pp. 17-18.

⁸³ Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*, (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999), pp. 104, 107.

⁸⁴ Scott, pp. 122-123.

bishop of Antioch in Syria and Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons had already expressed this view before Cyprian.⁸⁵ This became a well-known and core teaching regarding salvation in the Roman Catholic Church for more than a thousand years. However, the historical background, origin context of the saying and the addressee are rarely considered. On his way to martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius issued warning in his letter to the church of Philadelphia, a city in the vicinity of Ephesus, saying that “Be not deceived, my brethren: if anyone follows a maker of schism, he does not inherit the Kingdom of God.” This address is obviously towards people in the church and against Christian schismatics and heretics rather than people outside the church.⁸⁶ In Irenaeus work, he declared that: “In the church of God has placed apostles, prophets, teachers, and every other working of the Spirit, of whom none of those are sharers who do not hasten to the church...” In fact, his book was addressing the Gnostics and also against separation.⁸⁷ Even though in Cyprian’s time, non-Christians were still the majority in the Roman Empire, there was no instance that he addressed this warning towards the non-Christians. He directed this warning to Christians who were either in danger of being separated from the church by excommunication, or were already separated by heresy or schism.⁸⁸ So, quoting this axiom in the discussing salvation of mankind without awareness of the original context is dangerous.

The apostolic church inherited her authority from Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, what if people did not submit themselves to this authority? The church could excommunicate them. Why did people care so much about excommunication? Of course they would lose their status and connections in the community. Worse, they

⁸⁵ Francis A. Sullivan, S. J., *Salvation outside the Church?* (NY: Paulist Press, 1992), pp. 18-19.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 20.

would be condemned to hell and eternal punishments as there was no salvation outside the Church ("*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*"). Therefore, the doctrines of hell and eternal condemnation empowered the Church to keep the discipline of all believers as the church may excommunicate anyone not complying with her teaching and they would lose their hope of going to heaven. With the teaching of universal salvation, the hope that everybody will be saved at the end, there was fear that the doctrine of universal salvation would cause general immorality and social upheaval.⁸⁹ So, there were good reasons for officials in the established church not being eager to teach, or even discuss about, such a topic. Otherwise, the social structure might be threatened with the weakening of the authority and people would become immoral as they might think they could commit sins at will without worrying about whether they could go to heaven at the end.

It might have worked pretty well before Reformation, when there was only one church on earth. With independent churches and new denominations sprouting during and after Martin Luther being excommunicated by the Catholic Church, the authority of Christian churches and the role of keeping discipline have been fading continuously. Nowadays, when Christians do accept the judgment of the church, they find another church, or simple stop going to any church. When a group of church members disagree with certain understanding or practice of the authority in church, they start another church. Some people may still try to emphasize that people will be eternally condemned if they do not convert when spreading the "gospel". It is not as effective as in the past because many would be more irritated by such a threat than frightened. In a word, the teaching of eternal condemnation can no longer empower

⁸⁹ Ludlow, p. 3.

the church in carrying out discipline. There is no point to be in favour of this teaching nowadays due to the fear that the doctrine of universal salvation may cause immorality.

In the past, the infant death rate was high and the average life span of adults much shorter than nowadays. Many people were anxious about where they would go after death. When universal salvation not preferred, to meet this pastoral care need of salvation assurance, *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* was a good solution. Becoming church member by receiving baptism was what everyone could do and this was a very good assurance that the church could offer when majority of the congregation was not educated and understood nothing about the theological disputes over soteriology. Despite being a tool for the church to control over people, such teaching about salvation indeed met the genuine needs of people in that period of time. It had its function but it is not the same case in the modern time. In a society that people have their education so easily and access to exploding information every second, most people no longer simply submit to authority and they are not satisfied with the idea of only people go to church can be saved. It is not convincing enough for them. People nowadays certain have different needs. It is worth noticing that even the Roman Catholic Church, who holds this axiom for more than a thousand years, gave up this approach in Vatican II.⁹⁰

The influence of Augustine

Although there were two important streams of eschatological thought, a universal view and a dualistic view, the dualistic view which held two parallel fates of eternal heaven and eternal hell was always the stronger. One very influential factor was the theology of Augustine the Hippo who denied universal salvation with a forcefulness

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

which had a profound influence on both Catholic and Reformed traditions.⁹¹ He sort of “invented” the idea of original sin from a wrongly translated Latin verse and, by his own experience, rejected the important role of human free will in committing sin and submitting to God.⁹² He strongly believed that the impiety would be condemned eternally and this very much strengthened the dualistic view in church hereafter by his strong influence in the Western and Protestant traditions. Here I would like to argue that, firstly, Augustine’s views in salvation was his interpretation of *Roman* out of his person experience and concern, in other words, “his own world”. Secondly, his views dominate in the church for such a long period of time, not because his suggestions were theologically without flaw, but it was more related to some right timing historically.

To understand more about “his world”, it is necessary to know more about his backgrounds. Augustine of Hippo was the bishop of Hippo in Today’s Algeria. He was a philosopher and theologian, and has been respected as one of the most important Latin Fathers and Doctors of the Church. He may be the most significant Christian thinker after St. Paul.⁹³ He was born in 354BCE in Tagaste, an agricultural village in North Africa to a Christian mother, St. Monica, with extraordinarily good virtue.⁹⁴ His father was of the middle class and was a pagan in almost his whole life. However, both parents are consistent in his education. Even though their family was not wealthy, they tried to provide the best education for Augustine.⁹⁵ He was first sent to excellent schools in Madaura, twenty miles to the south of Tagaste. After he

⁹¹ Ludlow, pp. 1-2.

⁹² 漢斯·昆，包利民譯，《基督教大思想家》，（香港：漢語基督教文化研究所，1995），頁 84。

⁹³ “Augustine, Saint.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2008. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. 20 May 2008 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9109388>>.

⁹⁴ Roy W. Battenhouse ed., *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp 15, 19.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p 19.

was 16, he was sent to the metropolis of Carthage, aided by money provided by Romanianus, a wealthy townsman of Tagaste. There, he became a master in rhetoric.⁹⁶

At the age of 17, Augustine began living with a woman from lower class and the woman gave birth to a son. It was a very common practice for learnt young men to have mistresses first and would only get married after they had gained certain status and were able to find wives from upper class.⁹⁷ In Carthage, he joined the Manichees instead of seeking the truth from Catholicity as he thought it was more intelligible than the Holy Scripture, especially the Old Testament.⁹⁸ The Manichean dualism offered young Augustine a soothing explanation for his own sense of moral frustration. He knew that, he himself was self-divided, torn between a love of philosophy and popular fame; also between aspirations after purity and the strong desires of the flesh.⁹⁹ He remained in Manichaeism for ten years until doubts aroused from the sudden death of his dear friend.¹⁰⁰

Then, he went to Rome and Milan. In the following period of time, Augustine met Ambrose and resolved his intellectual difficulty by discovery of Neo-Platonism and reading the Holy Scriptures.¹⁰¹ However, at the same time his moral hurdle was even harder for him. His mistress was sent away because his mother had found a young girl of better social status for marriage. Still, Augustine could not even wait for two years before his bride was old enough, and took another concubine.¹⁰²

Later he heard, from someone from Africa, about the stories of hermits, especially the Egyptian hermit Anthony, about the giving up of their marriages and

⁹⁶ Ibid, p 20-21.

⁹⁷ 賴品超,《靈程上的良師益友—聖奧古斯丁》,(香港:基督教文藝出版社,2003),頁 8-9。

⁹⁸ Battenhouse, p 24.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p 25.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 26.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, pp 27-30.

¹⁰² Ibid, p 31.

renouncing their social status and bright careers. These pierced his heart and he felt so ashamed of himself. He recalled all his own sins and had a hearty discussion with his friend Alypius after the guest from Africa left.¹⁰³

After the conversation in the garden with Alypius, he went out to cry because of his struggles in sins. Then, an event which seemed arbitrary happened: he listened to a rhythmic chant from some child next door, saying “Take up, read; take up, read.” He rushed back to Alypius and open Paul’s letters. He read the section where his eyes first fell. It was Romans 13:11-14, “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day: not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” Then, “a light of freedom from care poured into” his heart, and “all darkness of wavering fled.”¹⁰⁴ This was the conversion of Augustine and details of his struggles and sins are written in *Confessiones*.

As Augustine was a bishop and he himself had intensive personal struggles over moral sins, it is not surprising that moral impiety and pastoral care issue would be his major concerns according to his background. In his criticism on “Origen’s teachings” in his understanding, we can see his rejection of the chance that the impious might be saved as well:

But there are other teachings of this Origen which the Catholic Church altogether rejects, and as regards that which does not accuse him falsely and is not to be put off by those who defend him: in particular, his teachings regarding purging and

¹⁰³ Ibid, pp 34-35.

¹⁰⁴ William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine’s religious thought through the Confessions story*, (PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp 159-160.

deliverance and the cyclical return of the rational creation after a long period of time to the same evils. For what Catholic Christian, learned or unlearned, is not utterly repelled by what he calls the purging of evils, namely, that even those who have ended this life in crime and wickedness and sacrilege, and the greatest of impieties—yea, more, the devil himself and his angels—shall, though after a very long time, be purged and set free and restored to the kingdom and the light of God...¹⁰⁵

From Augustine's paraphrase of Origen's teachings, Tzamalikos pointed out that Augustine did not fully understand the Greek discussion as "he was slow in Greek and rather disinclined to this abstruse language".¹⁰⁶ Here, I doubt how he could correctly interpret the "teachings of the apostolic tradition and the early fathers" which were mostly written in Greek and be the major figure of "Orthodox" according to the traditional definition of Orthodox".

Augustine devalued the free will of human beings and suggested that all human beings have the sinful nature inherited from Adam so that no one could avoid committing sins. Everyone dies without being baptized into the Catholic Church, including infants, will be condemned to eternal punishment in hell. He emphasized God's sovereignty in everything and salvation is purely Grace.¹⁰⁷ But when challenged by the questions of theodicy as the issue cannot be determined by human's free will but some can go to heaven while others are condemned, he suggested the doctrine of predestination as the solution. Even it was criticized to be the New Determinism and regarded as Neo-platonism,¹⁰⁸ Augustine's doctrines were welcome by the Catholic mainstream as it favoured the strengthening of the

¹⁰⁵ Augustine, *De Haeresibus*, XLIII; Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, XLII, quoted in Tzamalikos, p. 238.

¹⁰⁶ Tzamalikos, p. 238.

¹⁰⁷ Pelikan, pp. 294-295.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

authority of the church. Another important reason why Augustine became so dominant in the Western and Protestant church, while Origen's influence shrinking, was that the Roman culture was growing and taking the place of Greek dominance in the fourth Century. A lot of Origen's work was lost and the only pieces survived needed to be translated into Latin. Many people at that time, including Augustine, was not fluent in Greek and many could not interpret Origen's work correctly. In the contrary, Augustine was an expert in rhetoric and his literature is abundant. His work became masterpieces in Latin world and was read by almost every learned man.

Augustine's doctrines were mostly out of his personal experience and concerns and his teachings were not entirely the same as "those of the apostles and the early fathers". However, even there were doubts about his doctrines and he had made use of Platonic philosophy, he was never accused of bringing pagan knowledge into Christianity or not being "orthodoxy". In the contrary, he became the most significant figure in Western church history. Despite the fact that his doctrines were in line with the Church authority at that time, I believe that an important reason was that he was born and worked in the "right" time: at the beginning of Roman culture becoming significant and his abundant literature work could become classics and at the fall of the Roman empire that the unity of Christian tradition was kept in terms of the church rule and its Latin legacy. However, it would be a different story in the modern world.

Sola Fide

The most dominating view in Soteriology in Protestant churches is *Sola fide* from Martin Luther. It has almost been regarded as the only golden key for anyone to get access to heaven, neglecting other aspects in salvation (e.g. deification) and other possibilities (e.g. universal salvation). However, many people overlook the

background where this view was bred. Again, it came from Luther's own personal concerns and it was one of the results of the dark ages in Western Church history.

Martin Luther's father was a strict disciplinarian and his mother was deeply religious but also superstitious. They offered him the best education they could afford and sent him to Erfurt University in the hope that he would become a lawyer. Luther always lived under the fear of judgment. He always struggled whether god was a gracious god who would admit him to heaven or a harsh judge who would pick on his minimal sin. After an experience of almost being killed by lightning, he gave up his studies at Erfurt University and started his monastic life. Even in monastery, he was still anxious about his own salvation despite his strict obedience to the monastic rules. Luther encountered many lenient approaches in salvation, emphasizing God's grace and mercy but he took the most severe approach possible, perhaps just to be on the safe side and relieve his doubts about God's mercy.¹⁰⁹ He dwelled in the issue of justification until his *Turmerlebnis*. He founded the true meaning of Paul's words in his Epistle to the Romans:

At last, by the mercy of God, mediating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Olson, pp. 375-376.

¹¹⁰ Martin Luther, "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings," in *Martin Luther*:

Luther's view of God and salvation was revolutionized by his new interpretation of the righteousness of God and the gospel of justification by grace through faith alone.¹¹¹ It also met the needs of the people under the power of a corrupted church casting burdens, which were not from the Bible, onto the congregations who could not understand the Latin Vulgate Bible. After posting the ninety-five theses and being excommunicated, Luther became a German folk hero for challenging the power of Rome.¹¹² His view of salvation became particularly significant in the background of the Catholic Church asking people for money and many other duties in order to "earn" their salvation. It was like a counter reaction to the extreme situation at that time. However, his emphasis on faith *only* also stamped out other aspects and possibilities of salvation.

In conclusion, there were individual concerns behind different views in soteriology. However, those concerns may not be the same nowadays anymore. Borrowing Heidegger's words, I would say every view in soteriology has its own world. It may be the best interpretation in its situation, meeting the needs of the people at that time, but it may not be as appropriate when it comes to another "space-time". In the contemporary church, we should not restrict ourselves to the full versions of any of the views tailor-made for churches centuries ago, but pay more attention to the needs and circumstances in our world now. As for the issue of "orthodoxy", the dominating views of salvation in the church history were regarded as "orthodoxy" not entirely because they fulfilled the literal requirement by definition, but by the acceptance of people at that time. Does it mean that the definition of "orthodoxy" is not important or without norm? No, but it just takes a contemporary interpretation. Stephen B.

Selections From His Writings, ed. John Dillenberger (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1961), p. 11.

¹¹¹ Olson, p. 377.

¹¹² Olson, p. 378.

Bevans mentioned three criteria for orthodoxy proposed by De Mesa and Wostyn in his book:

First, a new, contextual formulation of faith or of a doctrine should be oriented in the same direction as other “successful” or approved formulations....For Christians, this basic proposal is “God is Love,” and anything that would run in a contrary direction could not at all be an appropriate Christian theological expression. Second, de Mesa and Wostyn propose a criterion of Christian orthopraxis. A theological expression that would lead to actions that are clearly un-Christian (e.g. hatred of the oppressor or the taking of innocent life) could never be considered orthodox, no matter how meaningful it might be in a culture...Third, there is the criterion of acceptance by the people of God or proper reception.¹¹³

In order to fulfill the requirement mentioned, we need to look into the discussions of contemporary theologians who can represent the modern people of God.

¹¹³ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 23.

Chapter Four

Views of modern theologians

As the discussion concerning universal salvation was not adequate in the past due to different reason explained above and the factors marginalizing such “doctrines” may not be valid anymore, more attention should be paid to theological discussion in the last century while people are more open to this aspect and the views are closer to the modern situation. Whether it should be regarded as “orthodoxy” or “heterodoxy” should be determined by the contemporary people of God, instead of theologian or church authority in a different “world”. In the past century, much more scholars voiced out to support the possibility of universal salvation. However, most of them were far from being widely accepted by churches. As the aim of this paper is not promoting the doctrine of universal salvation over other doctrines of Soteriology but suggesting that diversity in the way to salvation was allowed in the creeds and there are supports that the hope of universal salvation should not be stamped out and regarded as heterodoxy in church, I would like to point out that some popular and well-respected theologian of this century, who are not radical, also hold the same view. On the other hand, as the importance of contemporary context is emphasized in this paper, there will be discussions in the second half of this chapter in response to the four views in salvation, i.e. inclusivism, exclusivism, pluralism and particularism.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a popular figure widely respected among Chinese Christians in Hong Kong. He somehow sided with the view of universal salvation. He said Christians are not much better than non-Christians, so Christians have no right to draw the line and condemn the non-Christians eternally.¹¹⁴ Similar view is

¹¹⁴ Tom Greggs, “Beyond the binary: Forming evangelical eschatology” in *New Perspectives in*

held by Karl Barth, a theologian most regard as neo-orthodox. He agreed that we should not set limits and divide people into elect or reprobate eternally.¹¹⁵ He admitted that the Apostles' Creed only mentions of eternal life but not of hell, even he was slightly inclined to Calvin's belief that the author was nice enough to be willing to speak only of comfort. Nevertheless, he pointed out that we do not have to believe in hell and in eternal death,¹¹⁶ and he tried to accommodate both the reality of God's judgment and wrath, and the salvation of human beings. He suggested that God is against evil but does not reject humanity, not even a portion of them. God is only against himself in Jesus Christ, who is the one "elect and reprobate man." It seems that his doctrines of salvation imply universalism and some even regards it as a twentieth-century form of Origen's *apokatastasis* but Barth refused to affirm or deny it.¹¹⁷

Paul Tillich, a German philosophical theologian, attempted to create a harmony of various philosophies and divine revelation using a "method of correlation."¹¹⁸ In one of his sermons on salvation, he mentioned who shall be saved. According to the fourth gospel, he said,

The world! The reunion with the eternal from which we come, from which we are separated, to which we shall return, is promised to everything that is. We are saved not as individuals, but in unity with all others and with the universe.¹¹⁹

In his dialogues with students, Tillich also expressed that "the merely transcendent idea of individual salvation amounts to abandoning the world to hell, not caring for

Evangelical Theology: Engaging with God, Scripture, and the World, Tom Greggs ed., (London; N. Y.: Routledge, 2010), p. 156.

¹¹⁵ Paul T. Nimmo, "Election and Evangelical Thinking: Challenges to our ways of conceiving the doctrine of God" in *New Perspectives in Evangelical Theology: Engaging with God, Scripture, and the World*, Tom Greggs ed., (London; N. Y.: Routledge, 2010), pp. 31-35.

¹¹⁶ Karl Barth, *The Faith of the Church: A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*, Jean-Louis Leuba ed. Gabriel Vahanian trans., (London and Glasgow: Collins Clear-type Press, 1958), pp. 144-146.

¹¹⁷ Olson, pp. 585-586.

¹¹⁸ Olson, p. 85.

¹¹⁹ Paul Tillich, *The Eternal Now*, (London: SCM Press, 1963), pp. 102.

the problems of justice, leaves people to antireligious movements.”¹²⁰ He believes that with respect to individual salvation, we cannot make any judgment.¹²¹

It is the world's trend to allow and respect diversity. Hans Küng is a priest and one of the best known Catholic theologian who has been very active in ecumenical movement. He believes that the punishment of hell is only imposed for a time and he agrees that the teaching of eternal condemnation was a way to secure church power in the past.¹²² For the understanding about hell and the punishment of hell, Küng summarized into four main points:¹²³

- Hell in any case is not to be understood mythologically as a place in the upper- or underworld, but theologically as an exclusion from the fellowship of the living God, described in a variety of images but nevertheless unimaginable, as the absolutely final possibility of distance from God, which man cannot of himself *a priori* exclude. Man can miss the meaning of his life, he can shut himself out of God's fellowship.
- The New Testament statements about hell are not meant to supply information about a hereafter to satisfy curiosity and fantasy. They are meant to bring vividly before us here and now the absolute seriousness of God's claim and the urgency of conversion in the present life. This life is the emergency we have to face.
- Anyone who fails to perceive the seriousness of the biblical warnings of the possibility of eternal failure judges himself. Anyone who is inclined to despair in face of the possibility of such a failure can gain hope from the New Testament statements about God's universal mercy.

¹²⁰ Paul Tillich, *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogued*, Mackenzie Brown ed., (London: SCM Press, 1965), p. 124.

¹²¹ Paul Tillich, *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogued*, p. 219.

¹²² Küng, pp. 172-174.

¹²³ Hans Küng, *Eternal Life?* Edward Quinn trans., (NY: Doubleday, 1984), pp. 141-142.

- The eternity of the “punishment of hell” (of the “fire”), asserted in some New Testament metaphorical expressions, remains subject to God and to his will. Individual New Testament texts, which are not balanced by others, suggest the consummation of a salvation of all, an all-embracing mercy.

Obviously, he does not hold the rigid view that hell and its punishment are eternal and at least some people would be condemned eternally.

From the brief review above, we can see that these highly respected theologians of the contemporary time all embrace the hope of universal salvation in certain extent. Even they had their own approach to interpret the Bible and the Christian doctrines, they allow diversity to remain in the doctrines of Soteriology as in the Ecumenical Creeds. They never narrow down salvation into just, namely *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, predestination, or *Sola Fide*, but dig deep into the abundant meaning behind the word “salvation”.

Apart from the endless arguments over salvation among different theological traditions, living in the contemporary era, we cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that Christians are not the majority in the world but Christianity is only a part, even though a major one, of the rich religious diversity in the world.¹²⁴ It is natural for the present theological discussion to fall in interreligious dialogue. So, when we talk about the important issue of salvation, not responding to this issue is not possible, especially when the present context is essential in appropriate interpretation of orthodox. Here, Christian exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism and particularism are addressed. Terminology is sometimes confusing and there may be different understandings of the terminology, so a brief definition of the terms used will be included. As discussions concerning the four options could be borderless when

¹²⁴ John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 1.

different religions were involved and the target readers of this paper are mainly Christians of Protestant churches in Hong Kong, discussions will be mainly related to certain Christian perspectives or even the perspectives of the representative theologians mentioned.

The Christian exclusivism in general believes Christianity is the only truth and all other religions are not.¹²⁵ “The exclusivist approach stresses the necessity of belief in Christ as God’s saving revelation to all of humanity and proclaims the necessity of membership in Christ’s community for all.”¹²⁶ Therefore, the only way of salvation is through Jesus Christ and a conversion to become Christians during life time is necessary to avoid eternal condemnation to hell. In Spite of the Biblical grounds claimed by the exclusivists, I must point out that exclusivism implies that God’s eternal salvation plan would fail as the majority of humanity would be condemned to hell at the end.¹²⁷ This approach is an “influential reduction which has been the narrowing of redemption to justification.” Emphasizing the justification of the individual human subject, it interpreted reconciliation and justification primarily in religious and moral categories and neglected or passed over lightly the cosmic and social soteriology of the ancient church.¹²⁸ The threat of eternal punishments from the pessimistic views of Augustine in salvation has become a tool in evangelism. As the result, the “good news” of the kingdom of god becomes the “bad news” about judgment and punishment to the non-Christian world.¹²⁹ It somehow echoes *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* of the middle-age Roman Church.

¹²⁵ Chin Ken Pa, *The (Im)Possibility of Faith*, (Hong Kong: Verbum Press, 2004), p. 138.

¹²⁶ Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “Christian Redemption Between Colonialism and Pluralism” in *Reconstructing Christian Theology*, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark Lewis Taylor, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 281.

¹²⁷ John R. Sachs, S. J., “Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell” in *Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church*, ed. William R. Barr, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), p. 514.

¹²⁸ Fiorenza, pp. 286-287.

¹²⁹ Sachs, pp. 514-515.

However, after Vatican II, even the supposedly conservative Roman Catholic Church has given up such a position in soteriology and took an inclusive approach. The Christian exclusivism seems to be the most conservative approach that can hardly respond to the modern world.

Christian inclusivism does not reject other religions totally, regarding them as illusions or entirely false. It acknowledges that there are certain truths in other religions but Christianity is the one true religion with more complete revelation that can bring humanity to the only God. The presence of this God and His grace are universal and can be sought in various ways.¹³⁰ This idea has its historical roots which can be traced back to the time as early as Irenaeus. The contemporary proposal in this rein is most detailed presented by Karl Rahner and in Vatican II of the Roman Catholic Church. He believes that all religions manifest the grace and salvation of Christ, but Christianity is the high point of the historical religious evolution. Even God's grace is present in all religions, the presence is "inadequate" or "deficient" insofar as God's most complete and more explicit presence is in Christianity. Christianity is the explicit sign that makes manifest what is hidden or anonymous elsewhere.¹³¹ Karl Rahner's new concept of "anonymous Christians" tries to accommodate both the necessity of the Christian faith and the universal love of God.¹³² This approach does not so much demand conversion as demand enlightenment as it calls for the uncovering of implicit or anonymous structures of Christian truth represented in other religions. However, it is criticized that it does not mean true respect for other religions and room for genuine interreligious dialogue, as long as the presupposition of Christianity as the only true religion over others.¹³³

¹³⁰ Fiorenza, p. 281.

¹³¹ Fiorenza, pp. 281-282.

¹³² 黃勇，〈宗教多元論和宗教對話〉，載於《道風漢語神學學刊》，第四期，1996，頁 12-13。

¹³³ *ibid.*

It is believed that genuine and equal interreligious dialogue can only be possible through the third approach, i.e. religion pluralism. There are many forms of pluralism but John Hick's model is the most well-known. He believes that there is one God as the centre of the religious universe, not Christianity or any other religions. If God is the sun, the origin of light and life, all the religions are just using different ways to reflect His light. Religion is dependent on culture, so there are different religions as there is a diversity of culture. Every religion reflects the same reality but each has its own strengths and problems, so there should be dialogues so that people can grab a more comprehensive knowledge of the God. Hick focuses on the general phenomena of different religions, finding things in common. He somehow aims at creating a world religion.¹³⁴ However, Hick's proposal is criticized for being insufficiently pluralistic. Implicitly from the viewpoint of God as infinitely transcendent, it assumes that other religions represent in their own way this Christian, Neo-platonic, transcendent conception of God.¹³⁵ S. M. Heim thinks that Hick's perspectival pluralistic approach is not addressing the diversity of religions but ignoring the particularity of each of them.¹³⁶

Heim's "realistic" pluralistic approach is then regarded as particularism. He proposed that there are different realities in different religion. Different religions are not different keys to the same lock. In the case of salvation, if salvation means to break the barriers of sin and death in order to return to the harmony relationship with God, only Christianity can save mankind. However, salvation means to get rid of all desires, only Buddhism can do that. Heim believes that this kind of pluralism is the real pluralism and it can avoid conflicts among religions as they are not the competitors for the same thing. The value of the interreligious dialogue in

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 13-18.

¹³⁵ Fiorenza, p. 283.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 20.

particularism is to clarify the ultimate goal of each religion, so that people may know which one they are after.¹³⁷ Particularism seems to be the best way in dealing with religious diversity in the modern world as it can avoid conflict without reconciliation involving surrender of either side. In my opinion, particularism should have no problem harboring Origen's apokatastasis; but it appears to be avoiding conflicts rather than giving solutions. My personal doubt is whether those who could attain salvation in Buddhism, i.e. getting rid of all desires, would have the possibility of getting into the Christian hell, not being able to reconcile with God if there is a final judgment at the end of the world.

In conclusion, except Christian exclusivism, the other three approaches acknowledge the contemporary situation to a certain extent and I believe apokatastasis is acceptable as a possibility in all three of them. Even Karl Barth who is mostly classified as exclusivist would not rule out the possibility of a universal salvation as mentioned in the first half of this chapter. I strongly believe that the contemporary Protestant churches in Hong Kong should review their attitudes towards the traditional "orthodox" understanding of salvation and that towards the universal salvation.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 13-18.

Conclusion

The belief of universal salvation is not a doctrine without weakness, but like other "orthodox" doctrines, there are supporting evidence as well as room for discussion. The protracted hostile attitudes towards it came from all directions (ignorance of Greek philosophy, personal interest, political reasons, definition of "orthodoxy", church disciplinary system, and historical and personal concerns, etc.) but most were not theological. Most of these were historical incidents that made the views against or marginalizing a universal salvation dominant for certain period of time. As most of these are not the same anymore in the modern world and there are constructive, contemporary theological views to consider, it is time for the modern church to get rid of those invisible fears and pressure in mentioning universal salvation. Such teaching and discussions should not be avoided in church as a kind of taboo and I long to see more constructive development or even amendments on the topic of apokatastasis or universal restoration in future.

On the other hand, probably developed from *Sola Fide*, there has been a trend of over-narrowing salvation into a simple confession in many churches in Hong Kong. Those who died without doing that conversion prayer are believed to be condemned to hell. This kind of doctrine in soteriology is almost believed to be the most important thing in evangelization and became the only focus most of the time. Even the social services done by some "evangelical" churches are considered merely the means to convert people into Christianity. What about healing, deification, Jesus' example of serving the needy without requesting them to convert, etc.? Obviously, salvation is more than a simple confession.¹³⁸ The creeds left the definition of salvation open but this trend in Hong Kong has closed it to the narrowest sense.

¹³⁸ Pelikan, pp. 154-155.

ignoring many other important aspects and killing the room for other possibilities. I strongly believe that it is not a healthy trend. Diversity should be allowed in teachings about salvation in church and different aspects of Soteriology should be included. As many modern theologians, like Karl Barth, Paul Tillich and Hans Küng, have done much in developing and interpreting the doctrines according to the contemporary situation, those discussion should be introduced into the teachings in the church whenever appropriate.

In response to the modern environment and the worldwide diversity in religion, Origen's apokatastasis is comparatively more relevant than the traditional exclusive approach. It does not condemn the majority who are not converted to eternal hell, while the serious problem in theodicy is not caused either. I agree with Sachs that God wishes final salvation for all mankind and hell is not an additional punishment of God but the self-chosen alienation from God. In fact, Origen's apokatastasis can be a balanced solution to multiple concerns in salvation: God's sovereignty is preserved without giving up human's free will; both God's love and human responsibility are addressed; salvation for all mankind in a pluralistic world without rejecting the existence of hell and punishment. So, this approach of universal salvation has been greatly devalued in present Protestant churches in Hong Kong. In more explicit words, I mean modern churches should not hold tight only to teachings, selectively according to certain prejudice, centuries ago just because they were regarded as "orthodoxy". It is time to reflect and reinterpret traditional doctrines according to the contemporary needs of people, instead of holding fast to "traditional" values without serious understanding.

A. The Canons of 543

1. If anyone says or holds that the souls of human beings pre-exist, as previously minds and holy powers, but that they reached satiety with divine contemplation and turned to what is worse and for this reason grew cold in the love of God and are therefore called souls, and were made to descend into bodies as a punishment, let him be anathema.
2. If anyone says or holds that the Lord's soul pre-existed and came into being united to God the Word before the incarnation and birth from a virgin, let him be anathema.
3. If anyone holds or says that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was first formed in the womb of the holy Virgin and that afterwards both God the Word and the soul, being pre-existent, were united to it, let him be anathema.
4. If anyone says or holds that the Word of God became like all the heavenly orders, becoming cherubim for the cherubim, seraphim for the seraphim, and becoming (in a word) like all the powers above, let him be anathema.
5. If anyone says or holds that at the resurrection the bodies of human beings will be raised spherical and does not profess that we shall be raised upright, let him be anathema.
6. If anyone says or holds that heaven, sun, moon, stars, and the waters above the heavens are ensouled and rational powers, let him be anathema.
7. If anyone says or holds that in the age to come Christ the Master will be crucified on behalf of demons as well as on behalf of human beings, let him be anathema.
8. If anyone says or holds that God's power is finite and that he created [only] what he could grasp and comprehend, or that creation is coeternal with God, let him be anathema.
9. If anyone says or holds that the punishment of demons and impious human beings is temporary and that it will have an end at some time, and that there will be a restoration of demons and impious human beings, let him be anathema.

B. The Canons of 553

1. If anyone advocates the mythical pre-existence of souls and the monstrous restoration that follows from this, let him be anathema.
2. If anyone says that the origin of all rational beings was incorporeal and material minds without any number or name, with the result that there was a henad of them all through identity of substance, power and operation and through their union with and knowledge of God the Word, but that they reached satiety with divine contemplation and turned to what is worse, according to what the drive to this in each one corresponded to, and that they took more subtle or denser bodies and were allotted names such that the powers above have different names just as they have different bodies, as a result of which they became and were named some cherubim, some seraphim, and others principalities, powers, dominations, thrones, angels, and whatever heavenly order there are, let him be anathema.
3. If anyone says that the sun, the moon and the stars, belonging themselves to the same henad of rational beings, became what they are through turning to what is worse, let him be anathema.
4. If anyone says that the rational beings who grew cold in divine love were bound to our more dense bodies and were named human beings, while those who had reached the acme of evil were bound to cold and dark bodies and are and are called demons and spirits of wickedness, let him be anathema.
5. If anyone says that from the state of the angels and archangels originates that of the soul, and from that of the soul that of demons and human beings, and from that of human beings angels and demons originate again, and that each order of the heavenly powers is constituted either entirely from those below or those above or from both those above and those below, let him be anathema.
6. If anyone says that the genus of demons had a double origin, being compounded both from human souls and from more powerful spirits that mind alone remained constant in divine love and contemplation, and that it became Christ and king of all rational beings and created the whole of corporeal nature, both heaven and earth, and what is intermediate, and that the universe came into being containing real elements that are older than its own existence, that is, the dry, the liquid, heat and cold, and also the form according to which it was fashioned, and that the all-holy and consubstantial Trinity did not fashion the universe as the cause of its creation but that mind, as they assert, existing before the universe as creator, gave being to the universe itself and made it created, let him be anathema.

7. If anyone says that Christ, described as existing in the form of God, united to God the Word even before all the ages, and as having emptied himself in the last days into what is human, took pity, as they assert, upon the multifarious fall of the beings in the same henad and, wishing to restore them, passed through everything and took on various bodies and received various names, becoming all things to all, among angels an angel, among powers a power, and among the other orders or genera of rational beings took on appropriately the form of each, and then like us partook of flesh and blood and became for human beings a human being, [if anyone says this] and does not profess that God the Word emptied himself and became a human being, let him be anathema.
8. If anyone says that God the Word, consubstantial with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, who was incarnate and became man, one of the holy Trinity, is not truly Christ but only catachrestically, on account of the mind which, as they assert, emptied itself, because it is united to God the Word and is truly called Christ, while the Word is called Christ because of this mind and this mind is called God because of the Word, let him be anathema.
9. If anyone says that it was not the Word of God, incarnate in flesh ensouled by a rational and intelligent soul, who descended into hell and the same ascended back to heaven, but rather the mind they mention, whom impiously they assert to have truly been made Christ through knowledge of the monad, let him be anathema.
10. If anyone says that the Lord's body after the resurrection was ethereal and spherical in form, and that the same will be true of the other bodies after the resurrection, and that, with first the Lord himself shedding his own body and [then] all likewise, the nature of bodies will pass into non-existence, let him be anathema.
11. If anyone says that the coming judgment means the total destruction of bodies and that the end of the story will be an immaterial nature, and that thereafter nothing that is material will exist but only pure mind, let him be anathema.
12. If anyone says that the heavenly powers, all human beings, the devil, and the spirits of wickedness will be united to God the Word in just the same way as the mind they call Christ, which is in the form of God and emptied itself, as they assert, and that the kingdom of Christ will have an end, let him be anathema.
13. If anyone says that there will not be a single difference at all between Christ and other rational beings, neither in substance nor in knowledge nor in power over everything nor in operation, but that all will be at the right hand of God as Christ beside them will be, as indeed they were also in their mythical pre-existence, let him be anathema.

14. If anyone says that there will be one henad of all rational beings, when the hypostases and numbers are annihilated together with bodies, and that knowledge about rational beings will be accompanied by the destruction of the universes, the shedding of bodies, and the abolition of names, and there will be identity of knowledge as of hypostases, and that in this mythical restoration there will be only pure spirits, as there were in their nonsensical notion of pre-existence, let him be anathema.
15. If anyone says that the mode of life of the minds will be identical to that earlier one when they had not yet descended or fallen, with the result that the beginning is identical to the end and the end is the measure of the beginning, let him be anathema.

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